Short Form BA/BE

Species/Habitat	Status	Determination

Gold Hill Exploration

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Date: June 9, 2020

Project Sponsor: Marty Jones, USFS Minerals Administrator
Phone/email: (208) 983-5158/martin.jones@usda.gov
Address: 104 Airport Road, Grangeville, ID 83530

Lead Action Agency Contact: Curtis Caton, USFS Minerals Program Manager
Phone/email: 208-935-4262/curtis.caton@usda.gov
Address: 903 3rd St. Kamiah, ID 83536

Describe any coordination with NMFS and USFWS (including any correspondence). Specify contact personnel and dates:

Gold Hill Exploration project was introduced to NMFS and USFWS at Level I consultation on June 18, 2020.

Location(s) of activity: T26N, R7E, Boise Meridian, Sections 23 & 24

County: Idaho

Watershed and Stream Names: McGuire Creek

ESA-listed species present at the project site:

Species	Present?	Species	Present?
Spring/Summer Chinook	No	Canada Lynx	No
Fall Chinook	No	Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel	No
Sockeye	No	Spalding's Catchfly	No
Steelhead	No	Macfarlane's Four -O'clock	No
Bull Trout	No	Water Howellia	No
		Yellow-billed Cuckoo	No

Snake River Sockeye Salmon *Oncorhynchus nerka*	E/CH	No Effect
Snake River Fall Chinook *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*	T/CH	No Effect
Snake River Spring Chinook Salmon *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*	T/CH	No Effect
Snake River Steelhead trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss*	T	No Effect
Snake River Steelhead trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss*	CH	No Effect
Columbia River Bull trout *Salvelinus confluentis*	T	No Effect
Columbia River Bull trout *Salvelinus confluentis*	CH	No Effect
Westslope Cutthroat trout *Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*	S	May impact individuals but would not lead to a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability.
Interior redband trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss gairdneri*	S	No Impact
Pacific Lamprey *Entosphenus tridentatus*	S	No Impact
Western Pearlshell Mussel *Margaritifera falcata*	S	No Impact

Determination of Effects:

E=Endangered, T=Threatened, S=Sensitive, CH=Critical Habitat

Rationale:

- No T&E species are present in the action area, the nearest known occurrence of T&E species (e.g. steelhead, salmon) is more than four miles downstream in the Salmon River.
- No designated critical habitat exists in the action area, the nearest designated critical habitat is more than four miles downstream.
- No water withdrawals are proposed for this project.
- One stream crossing exists in the action area. Stephen Hampton, South Zone Fisheries biologist, Nez Perce/Clearwater National Forest, visited the site in 2019, and determined the stream crossing had a hardened ford. A hardened ford would minimize any sediment produced during access to the project area.

Specific mitigation action(s).

Action Category	Specific actions included in this BA	Check all that apply
Fish Screening	Install, upgrade, or maintain fish screens *(NMFS must review engineering plans for installation or upgrading of screens)*	X
Fish Passage	Install or improve fish passage facilities (e.g. fish ladders or other fishways) at diversion structures and other passage barriers *(NMFS must review engineering plans)* Remove or modify water control structures (e.g., irrigation diversion structures) Replace culverts and bridges to provide fish passage and/or to reduce risk of culvert failure and chronic sedimentation, using the stream simulation methods from NMFS (2011b).	
Instream Flow	Lease or purchase water rights to improve instream flows Change or consolidate points of diversion *(NMFS must review engineering plans)* Increase efficiency of irrigation practices (e.g. convert open ditches to pipes, or convert surface water diversion to ground water well)	
Instream Structures	Install instream habitat structures including • Rootwads, large woody debris (LWD), and log jams • Boulders • Spawning gravels Install beaver dam analogs consisting of posts woven with willow/ alder. Structures will be approximately half width of channel	
Side Channels and Floodplain Function	Reconnect and restore historic side channels Modify or remove levees, dikes, berms, and fill	

Action Category	Specific actions included in this BA	Check all that apply
Channel Reconstruction	Reconstruction of existing stream channels into historic or newly constructed channels *(NMFS must review engineering plans).*	
Riparian Habitat	Plant riparian vegetation Reduce riparian impacts from livestock: • Install fencing • Develop livestock watering facilities away from streams • Install livestock stream crossings (culverts, bridges, or hardened fords) Control invasive weeds through physical removal or with herbicides Stabilize stream banks through bioengineering	
Road and Trail Erosion Control, Maintenance, and Decommissioning	Decommission or obliterate unneeded roads Relocate portions of roads and trails away from riparian buffer areas When part of a larger restoration project, reduce sediment from existing roads: • Improve and maintain road drainage features • Reduce road access and usage through gates, fences, boulders, logs, tank traps, and signs • Remove or stabilize pre-existing cut and fill or slide material Reduce sediment delivery to streams from other man-made sources	**X**
Surveying and Monitoring	Survey project sites: • Take physical measurements • Install recording devices • Determine fish presence (*electroshocking for research purposes is not included under this consultation*) Monitor project site and stream habitat after project completion Installation of PIT tag detection arrays	

SMALL NEPA PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

Project Name	Gold Hill Exploration
District Name (or "Forestwide")	Red River
County where project located?	Idaho
FS Personnel Name *If a partnership, please add name, phone and email; however, **an FS employee MUST BE the project proponent** and point of contact.*	Marty Jones
Legal Location	T26N, R7E, Sections 23 & 24, Boise Meridian
Decision Maker's Name	Terry Nevius
Is the project associated with meeting a Forest target?	No
Which CE Category does this project fit? *Provide citation: 36 CFR 220.6(e)(x)*	36CFR220.6(e)8 (8) Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads.

At what level does the Decision Maker want the project scoped?

External

<u>Internal scoping</u> will be through the Small NEPA IDT, unless otherwise specified. Scoping would be documented in the Extraordinary Circumstances Checklist.

<u>External scoping</u> will be with the public via a scoping letter, a legal notice, and the scoping letter posted on the NPCWNF website. The Project will only be scoped to the Tribe(s) et al (see block below) unless otherwise specified.

Provide a list of the individuals, groups, agencies, etc. with their mailing address and/or email address, of those who will be included for *External* Scoping.

- DO NOT provide only a name.
- DO NOT leave this box blank: **If no additional individuals are to be externally scoped please enter NA**.

Victor Schneider
1015 Clear Creek Road
Kooskia, ID 83539

Does the Decision Maker want a Legal Notice published in the Lewiston Tribune? Yes

The scoping period will be 14 days unless the Decision Maker wants to change it. 14 Days

What Level of Analysis (below) does the Decision Maker want for the Project?

_____ **Low level:** Choose this level if the project's level of public scrutiny is expected to be relatively low or unknown. Documentation for low level analysis projects would be a completed Extraordinary Circumstances checklist filled out by the specialists, including the name of the specialist who performed the analysis, the project name, and date it was completed. No other written documentation would be generated.

___X_ **Moderate level:** Choose this level if the project's level of public scrutiny is expected to be relatively moderate to high. In this case, specialists would complete the Extraordinary Circumstances checklist with the only write up being for resources that are present and the rationale for the effects call. No write up would be given for items in the checklist that are not present.

If the determination is no effect (which most CE's should have zero to very little adverse effects), then document *why* that determination was made in one paragraph or less. If the determination is an adverse effect, then *why* that determination was made would be written in less than three paragraphs.

List the Management Area(s) in which your project is located.

12D

What are the Management Area(s)' Goals and Standards* that are *relevant to your project?*

MANAGEMENT AREA 12 (539,884 acres)

A. Description

Management Area 12 consists primarily of forested lands. Timber productivity classes 3, 4, 5, and 6 are represented as are a variety of commercially valuable, softwood tree species. A variety of physical and biological environments occur as determined by soil, slope, aspect, elevation (approximately 3,800-6,500 feet), and climatic factors. This management area occurs across the entire nonclassified portion of the Forest. Although this management area consists primarily of productive forest land, there are minor inclusions of nonforest and low productivity forest lands.

In addition to the 539,884 acres mapped for this management area, there are approximately 29,193 acres of this management emphasis which occur as inclusions in other management areas.

B. Goals

Manage for timber production and other multiple uses on a sustained yield basis. Develop equal distribution of age classes to optimize sustained timber production. Manage at levels and intensities consistent with the schedules described in this plan to provide for other multiple uses and resources. Manage for roaded natural recreation.

The goal for summer elk habitat in this management area is to manage 109,444 acres to achieve at least 75 percent of habitat potential; 310,544 acres to achieve at least 50 percent of habitat potential; and 114,225 acres to achieve at least 25 percent of habitat potential. Specific methods of how to achieve this will be determined on a site-specific basis during project planning.

** Goals and Standards are described in Chapter 3 of the Nez Perce and Clearwater Forest Plans. Include any **relevant** Forestwide Standards found in Chapter 2 of the Forest Plans as well.*

Is the project in a designated Idaho Roadless Area (IRA)? No

If yes, which one?

Is the project in a congressionally designated area, ex. Wilderness Area, Wild & Scenic River Corridor, Research Natural Area, Historic Trail, etc.?

No. The project area is adjacent to the Gospel Hump Wilderness Area.

If yes, which one(s)?

Are there Floodplains or Wetlands in the project area? Yes

Are there Municipal Watersheds in the project area? No

If yes, which one?

Is the project located in an RHCA? Yes. Access is in RHCA

Describe the Existing Conditions of the project area.

The project area lies within riparian and upland areas of a small tributary of McGuire Creek, a tributary to Big Creek. The project area has been partly affected by historic lode exploration activities. A primitive, narrow road/trail accesses the area from Forest Road 311 at the junction of Big Creek and Mcguire Creek.

The recent McGuire Fire burned the area north of McGuire Creek and also burned over sections of the access trail along McGuire Creek.

Describe the Desired Conditions of the project area.

The project site will be returned to as close to original conditions as practicable through concurrent reclamation and applied mitigation measure

What is the Purpose and Need for the proposed action*?

The purpose of the project is to approve Victor Schneider's Plan Of Operations to explore for mineral resources on National Forest System lands in the area of the proposed action. In accordance with 36 CFR 228.5, the Forest Service is required to determine whether to approve the Plan, as proposed, or to require changes or additions to the Plan deemed necessary to minimize adverse environmental effects and to provide for reclamation of surface resources (36 CFR 228.8).

Describe the Proposed Action.

Victor Schneider proposes to conduct lode exploration mining activities on the Red River Ranger District. The location of the proposed project area is in Sections 23 & 24, T26N, R7E, Boise Meridian, on an upland ridge south of McGuire Creek.

The project area will be accessed from State Highway 14 to Forest Road 222, then to Forest Road 311 to the confluence of McGuire Creek and Big Creek. From there an existing trail will be taken southeast 0.9 miles to the project area. This trail runs parallel to and in close proximity to McGuire Creek. At this point an old existing dozer trail will be utilized to access the sample area.

Some trail reconstruction will be required to access the project area. The amount of reconstruction required will be determined by field review once spring snow melt has occurred.

- Some overland travel will be necessary to access trench sites. Some brush and deadfall clearing will be necessary.
- Felling of live trees will be avoided when possible, and necessary felling and removal of any live trees will be approved by the District Ranger beforehand.

Exploration will be conducted by trenching down to bedrock to extract rock samples for analysis. The number of trenches proposed is 25-30, each approximately 2-3 feet wide by 5-15 feet long. Total cumulative length of trenches is estimated to be 500 feet. Total surface disturbance of trenches will be approximately 0.04 acres.

- Excavation will be accomplished by a small (probably 15,000lb) track mounted excavator.
- Small samples will be processed onsite by use of a small crusher and hand panning/sluicing. Larger samples will be processed offsite.
- No water withdrawal will be required for processing, therefore no water permits will be necessary.

Concurrent reclamation will be utilized. Only one trench will be open at a time. As work at each trench is completed, it will be backfilled with overburden, existing stockpiled duff, vegetative matter and woody debris will be applied, and the area seeded and mulched.

- All disturbed areas will be reseeded with a Forest Service approved seed mixture as required.

Equipment to be used onsite includes a small track mounted excavator, 2 ATVs, a small crusher and hand tools. Crew will probably consist of two or three workers.

Due to the remoteness of the area, a camp will be set up near the project site. A 16-foot x 24-foot wall tent will be utilized for housing and a small temporary storage shed will be utilized for storage of tools and equipment for the duration of the project. Hydrocarbons will be stored in covered secondary containment and a spill kit will be maintained at refueling sites.

- Spills exceeding one gallon will be reported to the District Ranger and contaminated soils will be excavated and removed according to applicable regulations.
- No more than fifty gallons of fuel will be stored at the project site.

A stream crossing will be necessary on Big Creek and one will be necessary at McGuire Creek near the project site. Bridges or other crossing structures may be required for resource protection. The need for a crossing structure will be determined during field review.

- Crossing will be necessary for initial transport of equipment to the project site, then will be used intermittently by ATV/UTV, as required for supply runs.

List the Design Feature / Mitigation Measures * to be included with the Proposed Action.

General Requirements (NOTE: These are general requirements for mining related activities. Not all listed requirements are relevant to this proposed action. All requirements that *are* relevant to this proposal will be adhered to.)

1. Notify District Ranger or minerals administrator at least 48 hours before any work is to begin.

2. Wash all vehicles and equipment used at the site before being brought onto National Forest system lands to prevent the spread of noxious weeds, seeds or propagules.

3. Avoid disturbance of wetlands and stream riparian zones.

4. Avoid working on saturated soils. Exploration activities must cease to avoid sedimentation into intermittent streams if excessive storm water or ground water runoff is occurring.

5. Prevent discharge of water into any live stream or wetland. To avoid erosion and discharge impact to streams, all activities (including drilling, construction of pads, hand-dug sumps, and any overland travel) will be kept at least 164 feet (50 m) from flowing water that is down gradient.

6. Place weed free straw bales or install silt fence in places as identified by a Forest Service representative to minimize sediment migration from stockpiles and disturbed ground.

7. Obtain prior approval from the Forest Service for cutting or removal of trees or other large live vegetation. Downfall may be removed as needed.

8. Set aside cleared slash and green vegetation (e.g., bear grass) during test pit construction. Remove vegetation in clumps, if possible, with the soil mass intact. Store excavated topsoil and subsoil in separate stockpiles to be used during reclamation. Temporarily replant vegetation clumps in the topsoil stockpile.

9. Maintain only one (1) active pit or trench open at any one time. Reclamation may be occurring at one (1) other pit or trench concurrently.

10. To help alleviate the need for field crew to decide if fish are present in water withdrawal locations, a 1/8" screen will be installed on pump intake hoses even when utilizing a 5-gallon bucket with drilled holes. Water withdrawals will be located on small, high gradient streams as far up creek drainages as feasible to avoid habitat used by fish and sourced from streams under existing permits from the State of Idaho.

11. Collect process water in the existing pit. Regulate discharge to prevent overtopping the pit, and/or land apply excess water on a site designated by the Forest Service. Application sites will typically be natural sumps or depressions, pits or trap(s) that avoid impacts to wetlands or streams and minimizes impacts to other surface resources. Application rate will be such that overland flow is avoided and a natural infiltration occurs through forest duff.

12. Backfill and reclaim each test pit as soon as testing has been completed for that site.

13. Follow the State of Idaho Best Management Practices (BMPs) for all surface disturbing activities, reclamation, and abandonment. BMPs are outlined in the Best Management Practices for Mining in Idaho

Small NEPA IDT/resource specialists are listed below. Contact them if you have any questions regarding their resource for your project.

Botany – Mike Hays, mike.hays@usda.gov; 983-4028
Fisheries – Derrick Bawdon, derrick.bawdon@usda.gov; 963-4211
Heritage – Christy Mog, christy.mog@usda.gov; 935-4269
Hydrology – Cynthia Valle, cynthia.valle@usda.gov; 963-4203
Minerals – Marty Jones, martin.jones@usda.gov; 983-5158
Recreation – Carol Hennessey, cahennessey@usda.gov; 935-4270
Soils – Alex Rozin, alexandra.rozin@usda.gov, 842-2100
Wild and Scenic River – Chris Noyes, chris.noyes@usda.gov; 935-4251
Wildlife – Jim Lutes, james.r.lutes@usda.gov; 963-4202

Small NEPA Planner – Jeff Chynoweth, james.chynoweth@usda.gov; 935-4260